DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 133 840 EA 009 084

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TITLE Guidelines for Integrating Program Evaluation with Administrative Decision Making.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (84th, Washington, D.C., September 3-7, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administration; *Administrative Personnel; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Community Agencies (Public); Decision Making; *Information Utilization; Models; Organization; Organizations (Groups); *Program Evaluation; Self Evaluation

ABSTRACT

The internal resources an agency devotes to its own programmatic review and assessment can be most effectively related to the agency's administrative decision-making if the agency is self-evaluating and uses Havelock's model of linkage between formal research dissemination and utilization as a framework for the integration of program evaluation and administrative decision-making. The aspects of the Havelock model discussed here are linkage, which is the degree of connection among groups; structure, which involves the degree of systematic organization and coordination of elements; openness, which is the readiness to give and receive information; capacity, which is a summary concept tying together a number of variables that involve having the resources and competence to perform satisfactorily; reward, which has to do with positive reinforcement; proximity, which involves nearness in the physical sense of time and place as well as in the psychological sense of familiarity and similarity; and synergy, which includes the number, variety, frequency, and persistence of forces that are used to communicate evaluative findings. (Author/IRT)

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ED133840

Presented at the American Psychological Association Convention, Washington, D.C., 1976.

GUIDELINES FOR INTEGRATING PROGRAM EVALUATION WITH ADMINISTRATIVE DECISION MAKING

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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How can the internal resources an agency devotes to its own programmatic review and assessment be most effectively related to the agency's administrative decision making? This will be the primary question this paper will address. But before this, however, there is a more basic question: How should organizations (in this case, human service agencies), view their own purpose? The answer to this question assumed in this paper shall be that proposed by Wildavsky (1972)--they should be self-evaluating organizations. This self-evaluation is a continuous monitoring process of the agencies' own activities assessing whether goals are met and even whether these goals are still relevant. Evaluation data suggesting inefficiencies is taken seriously by administrative decision makers, becoming the basis for program development and change. Such an organization would be a paragon of efficiency and effectiveness. No doubt, full development of such an organization is unobtainable. Yet it remains the ideal and the premise for program evaluation and the basis for its integration within organization. The discussions below suggest ways to further the development of human service agencies toward becoming self-evaluating organizations.

Although much has been written about formal research dissemination and utilization (e.g., Havelock, 1971, Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; DHEW Series, 1972), very little has been said about the utilization of internal evaluative research findings within an agency (Davis and Salasin, 1975). Consequently, there are not numerous models to choose. However, there are a number of models proposed for formal research dissemination and utilization. Of these, Ronald Havelock's paradigm provides a framework around which the most important aspects of the integration by program evaluation and administrative decision making can be discussed and guidelines drawn.

Havelock sees dissemination and utilization as an act of communication between a research resource system and a user system. A resource system includes the body of knowledge of some area of research plus the persons informed of this knowledge and any other resource which could be used to impart this information.

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A user system is some applied area in which this knowledge, if adopted in the form of innovation, might result in improved performance. Integration is created through two-way interaction processes which connect resource and user systems. Both systems function more successfully when there is ample communication between them involving an exchange of two-way messages which continuously stimulate each other's problem-solving behavior. Seven factors are required to describe how both systems are inter-connected and to account for degree of successful utilization for research results.

The administration and practitioner parts of human service agencies would be comparable to Havelock's user system and agency's program evaluation capabilities is commensurate to the resource system. Program evaluation should not be viewed as just the persons and immediate resources available, but the potential range of consultants, prior research findings, and information systems which could be brought to bear.

Linkage

The first and most important concept is "linkage." Indeed, the other six factors can be viewed as additional ways to explain and enhance it. Linkage is the degree of connectiveness that exists among groups. Between resource and user systems, it can be measured by the number, variety, and mutuality of contacts and by the degree to which they share collaborative relationships. The more linkages and the stronger they are, the more effective contacts will be and the greater the impact one system will have on the other. Information will be more easily exchanged and influential. Research in a high linkage situation will develop to more closely meet user needs and will be more readily accepted.

Linkage is seen as the key concept by Havelock because he and the other reviewers of research dissemination and utilization have found that a gap exists between research findings and practice. Each arises from a system independent of the other. Researchers tend to write for other researchers and are read only by them. Practitioners are not knowledgeable about research and modify their programs based on conversations with other practitioners. As a result, researchers tend to do research of little interest to practitioners and

practitioners continue to run programs with disproved or unproved methods. Linkage, however, between these two has been shown to improve relevancy of research and produce programs incorporating methods of proven merit.

There is such a gap within human service organizations. On one side is the administrators and practitioners of the agency involved in the day-to-day management and delivery of service. On the other is a much smaller number of persons who are responsible for evaluation. The linkage between them is typically weak and ill-defined. Linkage involves both formal and informal contact. Without underestimating the power of informal communication and relationships, currently the greatest deficiency in human service agencies is the lack of well-defined formal linkage between evaluation and administration.

All too often the processes of evaluation and administration go their independent ways, not interacting with one another. Missing is the formal link, the person or persons who overlaps in responsibility for evaluation and administration and understands both. This is more than merely an assignment of responsibility shown in an organizational chart. The critical element is the real and knowledgeable participation in both processes.

Instead of real linkage there commonly is merely the appearance of it. To illustrate this, consider an example of pseudo-linkage in the situation where an evaluator reports to an administrator. The administrator who has had no training in evaluation or research is uneasy by the prospect of supervising the evaluator who he feels may reveal his ignorance. The evaluator coming from a research background is concerned with reporting to an administrator who does not understand research and may be unsympathetic. Each is unfamiliar with their respective roles. A weak relationship based on mutual anxiety and lack of understanding develops between them. The evaluator is left pretty much to do evaluative research of his own choosing rarely actually meeting with the administrator, but generating written reports. The administrator sees the reports, although he has a limited understanding of them, as tangible evidence of the productivity of the evaluator and his own successful supervision. Yet, he only makes limited and sporadic use of findings, if at all. Administrative decision

making and possible information the evaluator might supply are never, or only infrequently, discussed by them. The relationship never evolves to a point where the administrator defines his or the agency's decision-making information needs to which evaluator responds. Administration and evaluation are left as separate processes.

Conceptually, there are two models for a formal role linking evaluation and administration at top level of management within an organization: 1) the administrator-evaluator; 2) the evaluator-administrator. The administrator-evaluator is an administrator who has management responsibility for evaluation among other responsibilities. He is not typically a professional evaluator. The professional evaluator who directly conducts and supervises evaluation reports to him. Although not a fully trained evaluator, the administrator-evaluator either has obtained some formal training or gained an understanding of evaluation through experience. He knows its general methods of operations, strengths, and limitations. By his administrative position, the administrator-evaluator observes and participates in decision making. Consequently he possesses an understanding of these agencies' decision-making information needs. He sees evaluation as a tool and basic component of the agency whose purpose is to supply the needed information for administrative decision making. His function is to translate these needs to the evaluator, to monitor the degree of success to which the evaluator meets these needs, and input the information into administrative decision making.

The second model of effective linkage is the evaluator-administrator. He is a formally research-trained evaluator who directs and conducts the agency's evaluation activities. In addition, he regularly participates in the agency's high level decision making. He attends administrative meetings where management concerns are discussed and is free to communicate information. He frequently uses such occasions as an opportunity to convey evaluative information, both written and oral. He also takes an active part in deliberations expressing his own opinions and is seen as sharing in the ultimate decision. He shares in both evaluation and administration. By being directly involved in the decision-

making process, he knows the agency's administrative information needs. This permits him to plan both short and long range evaluative activities so that useful information will be available. The evaluator-administrator is responsible for the full range of evaluation steps; from planning studies, to data collection, to synthesizing, and finally to reporting to administrative decision makers.

The administrator-evaluator and evaluator-administrator appear as promising formal linking roles. The former is probably closer to typical current practice. The training of administrators in program evaluation is a necessary step to making this model widespread. The training need should not be to turn the administrator into an evaluator, but to educate him to be able to administer evaluation. The only additional responsibility is for him to function as a major source of evaluative information to other administrator decision makers. The evaluator-administrator role is more controversial and necessitates a change in the perception of the evaluator's function. The active participation in administration as a stated part of his responsibilities runs counter to the training of researchers. Yet, there is an inevitable pull on evaluators to become involved in administration. Rather than reject such activism, it might be better to structure it and ensure that evaluation is successfully linked to administration.

Linkage should not be viewed as just occurring at the top of the agency structure. Evaluator and administrators must be formally linked at the various administrative levels. At lower levels, evaluators should have a formal consultative role with managers. Moreover, as mentioned above, effective linkage requires close informal contact and relationships. However, the key to first establishing effective formal linkage and from this will come viable informal communication.

Structure

"Structure" involves the degree of systematic organization and coordination of elements. In order for evaluative information to be successfully incorporated into administrative decision making, there must be an organized framework. A structure with a rational sequence by steps, and a compartmentalized and coordinated division of labor within the agency. There must be structure for the agency as a whole and within and between the administrative and evaluative components.

There are four ways structure is directly important for evaluation. First, evaluation to be effective needs to have its own division of labor and coordination of effort. Whether conducted by one person or a large staff, evaluative activities should be organized into a system. Secondly, evaluation should have a structured and coherent view of the rest of the agency. It should be able to understand the various levels and sub-components and how they are interrelated. It should know the needs of the clients and the organization goals. It should have a good view and understanding of the agency's decision-making process. Thirdly, evaluation should be able to plan how information it has collected will be inputed in a structured sequence into the decision-making process. Like the development and operation of evaluative studies, data input should be a planned, structured activity--not a hit-or-miss afterthought. Fourth, evaluation must be structured within the agency so that it typically is not administratively under those who are directly responsible for the management of the program being evaluated. The formal linkage point between evaluation and administration should be at a high level. Although evaluation must be integrated into the agency, it needs to maintain as much internal autonomy as possible. Evaluation staff should work closely with program and administrative personnel, but be separate and independent from them. Evaluation staff should have a commitment to the agency's goals, but not to the methods chosen to reach them. This is the major difference between them and others within the agency.

Structure is of critical importance to administrative-practitioner parts of the agency if evaluation is going to have influence. As Horst et al (1974) have pointed out, if the program itself is not well organized it cannot incorporate evaluative information and modify programs. Administration must have effective structured problem solving and decision making process, or evaluative information regardless of its potential value will be of limited use. Moreover, just as evaluation should be organized to send information, administration should be organized to receive. There should be built-in times and places where administration expects and requests evaluative data.

Openness

The third factor is "openness," the readiness to give and receive information. It requires a willingness and readiness for the user system to accept help as well as a willingness and readiness of the resource to listen to user needs and to give help. Openness is based upon agencies acceptance of the ethic of the self-evaluating organization that change is desirable and possible. As long as a human service agency sees its purpose is to deliver fixed types of seemingly inherently valid services, openness will not occur. Information for such an agency will be viewed, at best as not needed, and at worst as a threat to its existence. However, without openness between evaluation and administration human service agencies will continue to deliver unproven or disproven types of services of limited usefulness.

For evaluators, openness means being willing to collect information that will be of use to administrators. This in turn requires the evaluator to listen to administrative needs and develop responses tailored to meet them. A primary evaluation objective, then, is the providing of information with utility for administrative decision-making. As a consequence, the validity of findings may be lessened; to a point, evaluators must be willing to run this risk. Obviously, if validity is too greatly reduced, the information will be meaningless. A part of the professional skill of the evaluator is to judge the relative trade-offs between validity and utility needs and decide the proper balance.

For administrators, openness means being willing to expose areas where they are uncertain or believe there are deficiencies. It should be an active process of requesting and seeking out information rather than passively waiting to be asked and provided for. As part of a self-evaluating agency, they are not held accountable to run perfect programs, but to be actively attempting to improve them.

Capacity

"Capacity" is a summary concept tying together a number of intercorrelated variables such as "wealth," "power," "status," "education," "intelligence," and "sophistication." It involves having the resources and competence needed to perform satisfactorily. Within human service agencies, both evaluation and administration must have the capacity to do their jobs in order for evaluation findings to be utilized.

The concept of evaluation information capacity was important enough to be discussed separately above. In addition, evaluation must have sufficient capital and ability to summon and invest the resources required to collect valid and useful information. Once information is collected, it must have the skill based on experience of imparting the data to administration in ways which heighten acceptability. Finally, it needs adequate power and prestige to ensure that this information will be attended to. Capacity, however, is relative and should be geared to the agency. Attkisson et al (1974) report that the type of persons who have functional role of the evaluator in different agencies range from statistical clerks to professionally trained researchers who participate in high level administrative decision making. These types of persons reflect the capacity of these agencies to conduct evaluation. For small agencies, a clerk may be sufficient; however, for larger, more complex ones, greater capacity is required. Even in the small agency, an administrator will need to direct and supervise the clerk--in effect, assuming part of the evaluation function; hence even small agencies need to have a relatively large commitment for meaningful evaluation. The over-all resources and competence of the agency should be matched with comparable evaluative capacity.

The combination of administration structure and capacity is that Horst et al (1974) call management. Without good management, they feel that evaluation, no matter how good by itself, will not change or improve agencies. Clearly, in addition to good administrative structure, agencies must have the capacity to run programs well before they can incorporate evaluative information. Like evaluators, administrators must have the ability to assemble and invest program resources. Moreover, they need self-confidence as well as administrative skill and sophistication. Good administration is the basis both of good programs and effective evaluation.

Reward

The fifth factor is "reward." By this, Havelock means the frequency, immediacy, amount, and multiplicity of planning and structuring of positive reinforcements for resource and user systems. In order for evaluation to be influential in human service agencies, a system must be created such that

evaluators are rewarded for good evaluation and administrators are reinforced for incorporating evaluative findings into their decision making. The simple fact is that now neither evaluators nor administrators are regularly or frequently rewarded for these activities. Often, the evaluator--even if only part of the findings are critical of current functioning--is ignored or even becomes a target of attack. The evaluation design with its inherent methodological limitations may be compared to narrow research standards and is concluded to be inadequate. Frequently the study is then disregarded and has no effect. Even if findings may have some eventual effect on program changes and improvements, beyond the satisfaction of seeing this the evaluation may be a personally negative experience for the evaluator. For the administrator, the evaluation can be equally unsatisfactory. Although expecting confirmation of this program's worth, a frequent result is an evaluation which is negative, at least about some major part of program operation, and perhaps even shows no over-all demonstrated effectiveness. Such findings might jeopardize the program's funding. He may feel his own professional ability is under attack, and indeed he may find himself being blamed by others, including his own staff, for the poor results rather than their accepting programmatic failure.

The lack of reward for participation in evaluation has a stifling effect. Campbell (1969) argues that new human service programs should be conceptualized as social experiments and not proposed as final solutions. They should rather be viewed as attempts, although well thought out and promising ones, to meet certain social problems. It is true that if evaluation were viewed so, adverse effects would be diminished. In light of the negative evaluative findings, administrators of human service agencies may begin to hold a more modest opinion about their programs' degree of success, stating them conditionally. Then, too, evaluators must modify the type of evaluations they do. Too frequently, evaluators take the pre-evaluation rhetoric about programs' effectiveness literally and design studies aimed to assess lofty objectives, ensuring that more modest achievement will be assessed as failure. While for summative evaluation stated goals have to be taken literally, most evaluation should be formative, intended for program improvement, determining success to be that which extends beyond current practice. With adjustment in administrative expectation and commensurary modification evaluation strategy, meaningful assessment of human service can be done that can often reward both.

Proximity

"Proximity" involves the nearness in the physical sense of time and place as well as in the psychological sense of familiarity and similarity between user and resource systems. The closer the proximity between evaluators and administrators, the more likely effective linkage between them, and in turn the greater utilization of evaluative information. Evaluators ought not be distant figures having their own "ivory tower" within the agency. They should be located close to administrators and practitioners, seeing them frequently--formally and informally. The evaluator should be able to speak in the terms and slang of the agency as an insider and be seen as "one of us," although with a different function.

There is also another meaning to "proximity": the proximity of evaluative information to the administrative decision-making process. Again, proximity has both a physical and psychological sense. Evaluation information should be close in time with administrative decision making. If it is given long before the decision, or after, it will be of limited or no use. Time and place are critical to administrative decision makers. Evaluators must further modify evaluation designs often at the cost of validity in order that some information will be there when the decision is to be made. Psychologically, evaluative information should be close to users' needs. It should be seen by administrators as related to their decision making. To the extent that finding need-interpretation and translation to administrators before their usefulness can be understood, the more likely they will be disregarded.

Synergy

The final factor, Havelock calls "synergy." It includes the number, variety, frequency, and persistence of forces that are used to communicate evaluative findings. His point is that successful research utilization required redundancy in communication. Evaluative information, like other information, must be repeated over and over again until it gets attended to and absorbed. Moreover, this redundancy should be organized in a coherent fashion presenting the message in a number and variety of forms.

The concept of synergy asks the evaluator again to modify what he was taught in his research training. Researchers are educated that end of a successful study is a written report, hopefully published in a journal. Evaluators, too, typically see the end of the evaluation as a final written report. However, if the evaluator is serious about his activities having an impact on the agency, then the classic evaluation report is no more than one of a series of ways by which he will communicate the information. Evaluation activity does not end with a written report, but moves into the internal dissemination stage. The evaluatior should develop a dissemination strategy to present the information in a variety of ways. The evaluator should fully utilize the linkage with administration, presenting information in meetings, both formal and informal, using summary abstracts as well as complete written reports, giving talks, making slide presentations, etc. Much evaluative information continues to be relevant long after the data collection and initial writeup of results. Like old wine, such information should be brought up from the written report cellar and served from time to time. Administrators will come to see the evaluator as a repository of useful information and will actually seek out input into their decision making. Thus, synergy will become an active process both for evaluators and the administrators.

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